

#77: How We Rest: Community, Slowing Down, & Listening to Your Body with Kristi McClamroch



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Marissa McKool, MPH

[Redefining Rest for Public Health Professionals Podcast
with Marissa McKool, MPH](#)

#77: How We Rest: Community, Slowing Down, & Listening to Your Body with Kristi McClamroch

Hey, you all, I'm Marissa McKool, and you're listening to the Redefining Rest Podcast for public health professionals. Here we believe rest is your right. You don't have to earn it, you just have to learn how to take it and I'm going to teach you. Ready? Come along.

Hi everyone. Today we are continuing our How We Rest series where I sit down and have a conversation with different folks in public health about their experience with rest, how they define rest, and their journey with rest. In these episodes you're going to be able to see how rest truly is unique and specific to each individual. And how different public health professionals navigate the challenges of the world that prevent us from getting rest.

Today we have Kristi McClamroch who's the founder of Public Health Connected. She's also an epidemiologist who has worked globally in HIV prevention and STD prevention, as well as in academia as a professor which she'll share more about her journey in the episode. We talk about all things slowing down, listening to your body, she shares about her personal journey with anxiety and chronic pain.

We also talk about the power of community and how that is so special in public health and many, many other things. So, I can't wait for you to hear, let's just get into it.

Marissa: Okay, everyone, I am super excited, my friend and colleague who's also on a similar mission as me is on the podcast to talk about rest. And I will let her introduce herself and share a little bit about who she is, what she does and then we'll get more into her journey and experience with rest. So, Kristi, take it away.

#77: How We Rest: Community, Slowing Down, & Listening to Your Body with Kristi McClamroch

Kristi: Thank you so much. I am really excited to be here. But I love that we are geographically close too.

Marissa: Yeah, we are both Bay Area folks.

Kristi: Both Bay area, so yeah, that's another part of our connection. So yeah, my name's Kristi McClamroch, and I am the founder and executive director of Public Health Connected which is a new a new non-profit organization. I founded during the pandemic. I mean we're still in the pandemic, so earlier in the pandemic. Yeah, and Public Health Connected is all about strengthening the community of public health professionals so that they can face the challenges of working in public health. And there are a lot of challenges in working in public health.

It's no easy field, no easy career, and yeah, I'm so excited that we have connected because obviously one of the challenges is about burnout. That's a huge challenge right now. It's funny, Marissa, because I say I started this during COVID but the challenges of working in public health were here long before the pandemic started.

Marissa: Yes, burnout included.

Kristi: Burnout included, yes, absolutely. And whatever happens with COVID-19, a lot of the challenges are going to remain. And then there will probably be future public health crises. Unfortunately, I mean they actually seem to pop up all the time. So yeah, I was really excited to find out about what you've been working on. And I think our missions sit together really, really nicely. So, I'm super excited to be able to be here.

Marissa: Yes, definitely. And can you just for folks who are listening who maybe aren't familiar, can you share a little bit about your journey before Public Health Connected? What has been your public health journey?

[Redefining Rest for Public Health Professionals Podcast
with Marissa McKool, MPH](#)

#77: How We Rest: Community, Slowing Down, & Listening to Your Body with Kristi McClamroch

Kristi: Absolutely, sure. So, my public health journey when people ask me, “How did you get into public health?” I actually got into public health from math. I was a math major in college and really liked numbers and all the quantitative stuff. And I ended up working, doing my senior thesis with an economics professor actually, who was working with someone in the epidemiology department doing some mathematical modeling of HIV transmission.

It was through the math department that I even learned what epidemiology was. And then ended up getting my master’s in epi and then went on to get my PhD in epi. I feel like a lot of people, they got in through biology or they got in through lots of different things. So, my path was through the math department which I think is kind of...

Marissa: I love that. I think that’s so cool. And as we know, actually we could use a lot more academic research on public health.

Kristi: Absolutely. I worked for some time when I was working on my dissertation at University of North Carolina. And then after that when I was a research associate, I guess, after I graduated but before I moved to my next part of my career. I did a lot of work in Africa, in the Caribbean working with commercial sex workers in terms of prevention of HIV and also other STDs like gonorrhea and chlamydia.

So, I was really lucky to get to go to all these places and meet all these incredible people, and learn about not just the health needs and how to implement public health programs in various places but also just getting immersed in the culture and getting a perspective of the fact that there is a world that is way beyond just the little, tiny little world that I live in, yeah, and kind of what I experienced. I mean that was really an important part of my time was this international work.

#77: How We Rest: Community, Slowing Down, & Listening to Your Body with Kristi McClamroch

I went to the University at Albany and was an assistant professor there in the epidemiology department and I got to teach which was really fun, and do more research. And I actually found while I was there that the programmatic stuff was so very interesting to me, not just the research side, but the get in there, really make an impact on people's lives. And so, I worked for a little while at a non-profit there. And then my husband got a job in California in the Bay Area.

So, we moved to the Bay Area then I did some consulting. I actually took some time for myself. We're going to talk about rest, but I took some time, some space for myself. I didn't go out and get another full-time job right away. I wanted to help my daughter with the transition of moving from New York all the way to California.

Marissa: First time she'd ever left...

Kristi: That's a big change, yeah, I mean I did some consulting, and worked on a book and then COVID hit. And I started this Facebook group, I started this Facebook group called Public Health Rockstars. Because I was feeling really isolated and overwhelmed by all the information and misinformation that was coming out about COVID. And just felt like all of a sudden everything was really crazy and out of control. It felt really out of control. And so, I started this Facebook group and just wanted to have an opportunity, a platform to talk to some of my public health buddies.

Because I wasn't going into work every day. I didn't have an easily accessible community and in that Facebook group I invited 50 people. And said, "Hey, if you want to invite other people, feel free." And in a day and a half we had 1,000 people on there. It was crazy.

Marissa: I just got chills, seriously.

#77: How We Rest: Community, Slowing Down, & Listening to Your Body with Kristi McClamroch

Kristi: I know. I still get chills thinking about that. I had no idea that that was going to happen, but it did and then it grew to 2,000. And then it grew to 3,000. And it was this amazing place and especially in the beginning of the pandemic, things were moving so fast. There is just so much discussion, not just about here is this study, what do you think of the validity? Or here's this piece of misinformation, let's break down why this is constantly crap. Or it was also the, how are you dealing with this? I'm feeling overwhelmed because of a, b, c, what are other people feeling?

Or one of the ones I thought was really interesting was when pods, people started forming pods, and people would post like, "So I'm thinking of forming a pod and I want to hear how other people are choosing their pod mates, or coming up with the pod rules." It was amazing. It was incredible. So that's really actually where Public Health Connected came from. I mean I realized that there was this power in this group. There was power and there was this need. There was a need for people to come to each other and just cope, and deal, and share, and relate.

So, I started a non-profit just from the idea of that group and that's become Public Health Connected and so here I am now, found myself of course. And I wasn't looking for it but it kind of fell in my lap. And I said, "Here's an opportunity, let me see where this takes me." And it's taken me to a pretty exciting place.

Marissa: Yeah. I love it. And I love what you said, essentially what I hear you saying, and I have felt this too even in starting my work. I even felt this when I was a full-time employee in public health. One of the things I love about the public health workforce is our own workforce community and how we connect to one another. And there's so much power in that community connection. And as you said at the beginning of the pandemic, just like everyone else in the world there is the worry and stress about what this means, and our health, and changes.

#77: How We Rest: Community, Slowing Down, & Listening to Your Body with Kristi McClamroch

But also, additionally no matter if you worked in infectious disease or not, I worked in academia and maternal health, everyone's workload doubled. So, then we're added on navigating more work on top of that. And I think the community connection that we have in the workforce was something that we were able to leverage because it didn't come out of anywhere. That's just been part of our culture I think in this part of the workforce, which is one of the best things I love about public health.

Kristi: I agree. I mean we spend so much time talking about, and thinking about various populations, other communities and I think sometimes it's easy to forget that we make up community as well as public health professionals. And that being a public health professional is not, at least for me, I mean that's part of my identity, that's part of who I am. That's not just my job. I don't put on my public health hat in the morning and take it off at five o'clock.

It's just a huge part of who I am because I think that people who have chosen public health as their field, they do it because they care so deeply. I talked to someone the other day who used the phrase 'heart centered.' And I was really struck by that, the idea that people who are in public health, they're here because this is in our hearts. We care deeply about other people, about other communities.

Marissa: Yeah, definitely. And I mean we're not in it, I always say this, we're not in it for the money or the fame because there is none of that. I mean there is some money. And I'm on a mission to get people better paid. But the other thing that, speaking about rest, is because we care so much, I think sometimes that gets in the way of our rest. And sometimes it's hard to detach from work and take that public health hat off.

So, with that in mind, given your personal journey in public health, but also creating Public Health Connected, knowing that we are redefining things all

[Redefining Rest for Public Health Professionals Podcast
with Marissa McKool, MPH](#)

#77: How We Rest: Community, Slowing Down, & Listening to Your Body with Kristi McClamroch

the time, I mean that's what this whole podcast is about. For you right now what does rest mean to you?

Kristi: That's a great question. I've been thinking a little bit about this. What does rest mean to me? I think for me, rest is really about slowing things down. I've been really trying to do that actually in lots of different parts of my life to just slow things down, be less reactionary and more responsive.

Marissa: Less reactionary and more responsive. I love that because the reaction is just the immediate pull go. But responsiveness takes some intention, and slowing down, and pausing, and thinking, everyone needs to write that down.

Kristi: Yeah, that's been really important for me. I'm someone who has lived with anxiety for a really long time. And I also have a chronic pain condition. And those two things tend to exacerbate each other. And for me, part of it was actually I started taking a new medication that was prescribed by a psychiatrist, a new medication that helps lower my anxiety a little bit, that help lower my pain a little bit. But at the same time, I really started thinking about slowing things down.

Because slowing things down also is like the medication gave me just enough movement to then be able to work on it in my actions, in my behaviors.

Marissa: I think slowing down looks different to everyone. And what are the levers that help you slow down look different to everyone. It looks different for us at different parts of our life. I've been thinking about this a lot. I'm so glad you mentioned the chronic pain, I've been thinking about this a lot, whether it's like as you know I was out sick last week and had to cancel a bunch of days. Whether you're sick temporarily, or you have a short term injury, or you have a chronic health condition.

#77: How We Rest: Community, Slowing Down, & Listening to Your Body with Kristi McClamroch

I think one of the ways that really prevents us from resting is not just the toxic capitalism hustle, hustle. But the abundant ableism in our society and our own internalized ableism about believing we should be able to do everything. Our body should be able to do everything. It should just go, go, go. And even when I was sick last week I was thinking about that, noticing my own internal ableism coming up and preventing me from taking the rest I needed.

Kristi: Absolutely. And I think for me this idea of consciously, purposely slowing things down, it seems like but if I slow down I am going to get less done. I'm going to be less effective. But it's like, no, slowing down created so much more space for me in my life. It created so much more space. And I think that's really important. I think that's a really important piece of it too. I mean yeah, it's like you should, it's all the shoulds. You should, I know, major eyeroll.

Marissa: I mean we all do it. We all do it. We all should ourselves. We put us under a pile of shoulds, yeah.

Kristi: Yes. You should be able to do all these things and your pain shouldn't get in your way, or your illness shouldn't get in your way. But, man, that makes it, get in your way so much more, telling yourself that.

Marissa: Yeah. I mean I think one of the biggest lies we've been sold, and I think this comes from all over, hustle culture, capitalism and even white supremacy or the patriarchy is this idea that slowing down is a problem. That there is a problem with that, or even the idea that resting, whether it's because you want to or because your body needs it is a problem. We think of it as a barrier, or a prevention rather than it is part of a normal human complete life.

Kristi: Absolutely. I think of rest kind of like I think of food.

#77: How We Rest: Community, Slowing Down, & Listening to Your Body with Kristi McClamroch

Marissa: Yes, oh my God, yes, tell us more.

Kristi: So, I really have actually been working on myself a lot in the last couple of years, very purposefully. And one of the things that I have started doing is mindful eating program, it's called Wondr. It's not a diet. It's not about restricting, or you can't eat this, you can't do that. It's really all about slowing things down, tuning into your body and giving it what it needs. So, it's about eating when you're moderately hungry and stop eating when you're moderately full. You have to be able to listen to your body's signals to do that.

The rest is kind of the same thing. It's like I have to slow it down to even realize when my body or my mind for that matter, needs a break, needs some rest. When things are moving so fast and go, go, go, I do not hear my hunger signals at all, and I don't hear my rest signals either.

Marissa: Totally. I mean that's why so many of us when it's two or three o'clock, we're like, "Oh shoot. I haven't eaten lunch." And I think you're right. It's about being able to consciously listen to your body. And I think both, what it's telling you it needs to rest but also what you want to do to rest. What sounds like fun rest? What sounds like enjoyment rest? And I think getting out of the belief that slowing down is a problem and that you have to go, go, go in order to listen to your body is a process as you said. You and I both have been working on this for years.

Kristi: For years. And it's still challenging and it's still hard.

Marissa: Yeah. And I think we're humans, it will be a lifelong process, not unless we get to enlightenment. But you make progress, you see change. It is powerful.

#77: How We Rest: Community, Slowing Down, & Listening to Your Body with Kristi McClamroch

Kristi: I had a friend who used to say that, “The good news is you’re still going to be working on your issues the day you die.” It’s real, and it’ll be a lot worse if my issues are still there and I wasn’t working on it.

Marissa: Yeah, you have a choice, work on it or not. And that’s part of being human. We’ll always have challenges with getting real rest especially because we in public health we want to make the world a better place. And I think many of us have this idea of what it could look like and we’re working towards that. But the truth is, for as long as at least you and I are alive and everyone listening, this world is going to be complex, and messy, and oftentimes fucked up. And so there will always be challenges to getting rest.

And as we continue to work on this individually and collectively and we make progress, we’re still going to hit challenges with getting rest. So, for you, what are some of the things that have been challenging for you now or in the past that you can share that maybe some of our listeners can relate to?

Kristi: That’s a great question. I think that a long time as a student and as an early professional, I really struggled with fatigue partly because holding onto a lot of anxiety takes a lot of energy. It’s exhausting when you’re struggling with anxiety. It’s also exhausting if you’re struggling with chronic pain. And I also take a lot of medication for my chronic pain. And that medication still makes me feel tired. But I was draggy.

And then I look back at my life in my 20s and in my 30s, and I didn’t even realize at the time how little energy I had. I really was depressed, not emotionally depressed, literally just down. My energy was depressed. And I think one of the things that was really hard for me was to not compare myself to other people. I would see other people who had all this energy, and I would be like, I need to take a nap in the middle of the afternoon. I

#77: How We Rest: Community, Slowing Down, & Listening to Your Body with Kristi McClamroch

wasn't the person who could stay up late and study with my friends or pull an all-nighter.

Absolutely, it's not in me, I can't do it, I got too tired. So, to some extent, I mean it wasn't that I didn't take the rest that I needed as much as it was that I felt badly about needing it in the first place.

Marissa: That guilt, that self-shame, yeah.

Kristi: I was that person who was like somehow it meant that I wasn't committed, or I wasn't smart, or I wasn't worthy. And it's total bullshit, absolutely meant none of those things. And honestly, I don't even think other people were thinking that it meant those things. I was thinking that it meant those things. Yeah. In the last, I would say in the last six months I've actually gotten to a place where I don't feel draggy in the middle of the day. If I need to take a nap or take a rest in the middle of the day, I will totally do it.

But all of a sudden I was finding that there were days where I didn't need to do it. And I think that a lot of that was about the slowing down, was about the being more purposeful. So instead of grabbing it where I could to be like, no, in the evening I am going to take rest in some specific way.

Marissa: I really do think what prevents us from getting the rest that we want and need, because it's different for everyone and every busy life, is our internalized dialog of the blame, and shame, and compare. And once you are able to slow that down, and quiet that and even get rid of it, it is easier to get rest. But that gets in our way. And that, the way the modern world has been designed has not been designed thinking about embedding rest or having rest be sustainable, or a part of it.

#77: How We Rest: Community, Slowing Down, & Listening to Your Body with Kristi McClamroch

So, we're facing that while internally we're facing our own comparison and shame. And when you release the internal piece, yeah, the external piece is still there but you're able to get rest even in the face of those external challenges.

Kristi: Yeah. No, I mean I definitely, I remember jobs and periods of time where one of the things that preoccupied my mind the most was how I could organize my schedule so that I could take a rest in the middle of the day. And how I could hide that that's what I was doing because that was ugly, or it was shameful, or it was, yeah, something that I should hide. Rather than saying, "You know what? Actually, I have my own challenges. And if this is what I need and I still get my work done then who cares?"

Marissa: I know, it's kind of like the backwards things, employers, and leaders, and organizations have been also sold this idea of, well, if we alter and give autonomy and flexibility for how employees rest, then it will reduce productivity and efficiency. But it's the exact opposite.

Kristi: It's totally the opposite. Totally the opposite. And I did tell you, one of the ways that I actually started taking rest which I never in a million years would have thought that this would be a restful thing. So, I did the naps and I love to read. I'm a huge fan of finding a fiction book that I can lose myself in, that's a big part of my rest actually. One of the ways that I feel like I rest is I started taking walks around my neighborhood. And I listen to my very specific playlist which is full of music that's all about being your authentic self.

And it's Badass Woman by Meghan Trainor. It's the stuff that makes me feel kind of energized and in my body, and in a really weird way. That is rest for my mind. It is energizing for my body because I'm moving my body, I'm taking a walk. But it actually gives my brain this break to just be surrounded by this music that I find really validating and affirming of my life

#77: How We Rest: Community, Slowing Down, & Listening to Your Body with Kristi McClamroch

and all of the things, all the things that I'm working towards. And so normally I wouldn't say taking a walk and listening to music is restful. But in some ways it actually is restful for me.

Marissa: Doesn't sound weird to me at all, it makes total sense. And being affirmed, being validated, being empowered, and being told, "Hey, you are appreciated for your unique self and what you bring, and you can honor that." And having that music in your head creates so much rest in your mind and your body. And so, I don't think that's weird at all. And I also think it's such a good example about how rest doesn't fit in a box. Rest can be so many different things and it can be different things to each and every one of us. And when you can expand that view you get access to way more of it.

Kristi: Yeah. Marissa, I feel like I want to share my playlist with you. And it would be so awesome to expand this playlist that is affirming and that is positive and about being our authentic selves because maybe other people might want to use that as way to explorer rest.

Marissa: Yeah, totally. If you want to share, we can link it in the show notes.

Kristi: Oh, my goodness, that'll be cool. That'll be really cool.

Marissa: I don't know, I'm not that tech savvy. So, folks, if you don't see it in the show notes, we didn't figure it out, but we can try.

Kristi: We didn't figure it out. But at some point I want to do something with that.

Marissa: That would be awesome. So, I love that example of getting rest. I actually recorded – it will have already been out by this time this interview comes out. But we're in past time for you all listening live. I recorded

#77: How We Rest: Community, Slowing Down, & Listening to Your Body with Kristi McClamroch

yesterday an episode about decision making being rest. And talked about I was on an interview with someone, she shared this, and I was like, "That's genius."

She's like, "You know what's been restful for me? Not wearing jewelry. I love jewelry but just having to make the decision of what to wear every day to match my outfit, taking that off the table at least for now has been really restful." And I was like, it's such a perfect example of something we would never think is restful, that is unique to them, that totally can be restful.

Kristi: Oh my gosh, that is amazing. that is really cool. And it totally makes me think of a song. I just discovered this song called Thursdays by Jess Glynne. And she's talking about how, I don't wear makeup on Thursdays. I let myself be my authentic self. I put on my sweatpants, and I get to just be. I just get to be me on Thursdays.

Marissa: Yeah. I actually think, talking about the pandemic, I think even though we're experiencing a lot of stress, I think we got some rest, for many of us, not all of us who were able to finally be at home and wear sweats and not do our hair and our makeup. And I think honestly, because of the heightened stress during that period, being able to do that was really helpful in a way that consciously I don't think we thought about.

Kristi: No, but you're so right, absolutely. And also, for people who commute, and we're able to work at home. That created some space. I feel like a lot of it is just creating some space for ourselves.

Marissa: Yeah. And the space you want, not a space you should have, or other people feel is best, yeah.

Kristi: Absolutely. The space that is authentically you.

#77: How We Rest: Community, Slowing Down, & Listening to Your Body with Kristi McClamroch

Marissa: I love it. We have covered so much. I've had so much fun. You and I could talk forever about this stuff.

Kristi: Yeah, we really could.

Marissa: But is there anything else as we close out that you want to share about rest or your journey with rest?

Kristi: that's a good question. Yeah, there's one thing that I want to add. So, I found out because I was struggling with sleep. I actually went to a sleep clinic and got a consultation there. And I learned that I have sleep apnea which I had no idea. It didn't occur to me that that was an issue for me. And so, one of the things that that did was give me information to then be able to address that physical issue, go out and get a CPAP and learn how to use it.

That's actually helped the rest that I do get, the sleep that I get is now more impactful. It's more effective. It lets me hit deep sleep more often. But I do feel a lot better when I wake up. So just to throw that out there that sometimes there are actually some quite simple ways to improve your rest.

Marissa: Yeah. And I think...

Kristi: It was kind of low hanging fruit, I just didn't know it until I reached out to be like, "Could there be any other reasons that I'm having trouble sleeping?" It was like this totally obvious thing that's actually not so terribly hard to address.

Marissa: Yeah. I mean there's so many – I mean this could be a whole other episode about rest in the context of not just physical but mental and how that's all interconnected, and sleep, and eating, and exercise, and emotions. It's all interconnected so even one thing like figuring out, this

#77: How We Rest: Community, Slowing Down, & Listening to Your Body with Kristi McClamroch

machine can help me sleep or this food is causing some inflammation. Or even just I function best in the morning. And in the afternoon I'm not my highest functioning. And for me that's best time for me to do low level activity stuff, whatever it may be.

It's kind of like a puzzle, we're constantly on a journey to learn about ourselves, which means learning what works best for us. So let all of our listeners know where they can find you and how they can get connected to you.

Kristi: Right. So yeah, our website is publichealthconnected.org. That's a great way to get all the information about us are our social links are there. There's a way to contact me directly on the website. Sign up for our newsletter because that's a great way to stay connected. And check out, I even mentioned this is the beginning that one of the things that we have is this program called Public Health Recharge.

In Public health Recharge we offer monthly group sessions for people in public health to just have a chance to talk, to talk to each other, that moment of like I can relate to that. That's really powerful and that's something that happens a lot in our research sessions. And so that's something that I hope people will check out as well.

Marissa: Yeah. And we'll leave all the links in the show notes for everyone. So don't worry, you can just click on them easy. But Kristi, thank you so much for coming on. I always love our discussions and I think there was just so much in this. I know all those listening have gotten so much out of this episode. So, I really appreciate your time, and for everyone listening I hope you walk away with thinking about how you can slow down.

Kristi: Absolutely.

#77: How We Rest: Community, Slowing Down, & Listening to Your Body with Kristi McClamroch

Marissa: Bye everyone.

Kristi: I'm going to go take a nap.

Marissa: Yes.

If you found this episode helpful then you have to check out my coaching program where I provide you individualized support to create a life centered around rest. Head on over to mckoolcoaching.com, that's M-C-K-O-O-L coaching.com to learn more.